

# Committee sends parking resolution to full council

■ If approved, policy could offer free parking to all county library patrons

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A resolution establishing a free-parking policy for all Montgomery County libraries left the County Council's Health and Human Services Committee on Monday with a recommendation that the full council consider the proposal.

The 2-1 endorsement sets the stage for a County Council vote that could bring free parking to patrons of the new Rockville library and other county facilities slated for metered systems.

Co-sponsored by six council members, the resolution came after public pressure for free parking at the new Rockville Library took the spotlight in February.

Since County Councilman Philip

M. Andrews (D-Dist. 3) held a press conference that month to urge the county to offer free parking to library patrons there, politicians have debated who would pay for it — the county, the city, which will operate three parking garages in the Town Square redevelopment project where the library is under construction, or the patrons.

If the full council endorses the resolution, free parking would be implemented for the Bethesda Library, currently the only full-service branch in the county with metered spaces. Plans for paid parking at the proposed Silver Spring and Shady Grove branches would be changed. All other county libraries offer free parking to patrons.

How the county would pay for parking in Rockville's garages, where most patrons are expected to park, and how to assure only patrons get a free pass remain unresolved.

With implementation still being studied, the county should create a

non-departmental account to pay for the cost, said Andrews, of Gaithersburg, who authored the resolution.

"This is a little bit like budgeting for snow removal," he said. "We don't know exactly how much it's going to cost, but we know we're going to do it. We commit to doing it, then we get a bill and then we pay it."

Councilman Steven A. Silverman (D-At large) of Silver Spring suggested the County Council could insert "a place holder" in the upcoming operating budget and then adjust the funding to meet the financial reality.

County staff estimates it would cost \$15,000 to establish a validation system and between \$425,000 and \$525,000 in annual costs.

Parker Hamilton, director of Montgomery County Public Libraries, cautioned Silverman that the preliminary estimates were very rushed.

Health and Human Services Committee Chairman George L. Lev-

enthal (D-At large) of Takoma Park opposed the resolution.

"I think it's unwise to provide an incentive to drive to a library in an urban area," he said.

A countywide policy would mean removing parking meters in Bethesda that prevent commuter use of patron parking spaces, he said.

Leventhal asked about transportation subsidies for non-driving patrons, financial support some residents have requested.

"Or is this policy only rewarding automobile use," he asked, before adding he did not know how to implement such an idea.

Andrews said the county already has subsidized inexpensive Ride On bus passes, which in one package offer unlimited ridership during a two-week period.

The Rockville City Council agreed earlier this month to use an open-access, multi-space meter system with units capable of accepting cash, credit, debit or "smart cards" as pay-

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ment. Bids for the prepay system are expected to be received within eight weeks.

Councilman Thomas E. Perez (D-Dist. 5) of Takoma Park, also a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, voted in favor of sending the resolution to the full council.